

Pilots Patrol Colorado and Kansas Looking for Stricken Motorists

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A dozen airplanes flew over parts of Kansas and Colorado on New Year's Day to look for travelers who had become snowbound in the huge blizzard that brought highway travel to a screeching halt.

Utility crews struggled Monday to restore services to tens of thousands of homes and businesses across Colorado and Kansas that had lost power following a blizzard that dumped nearly 3 feet of snow across the landscape. Some snowdrifts were as high as 15 feet, choking roadways and burying cars.

Six planes from the Civil Air Patrol were sent aloft on Monday over Colorado's Kit Carson County to search for people who were snowbound along Interstate 70. The highway had reopened Sunday, but travelers were still stuck in some places. In Kansas, six other planes were sent up to search for snowbound travelers.

The storm, which struck the area on Thursday, was the region's second massive blizzard in the past two weeks. There have been at least 12 deaths in four states resulting from the storms. By Monday the storm had moved toward the East Coast and turned into heavy rain, but a few roads in western Kansas and southeastern Colorado were still blocked by snow.

Several of the planes circling above the frozen landscape were equipped with infrared heat-sensing equipment to help them spot stranded livestock among the snowdrifts. Authorities considered using C-130 cargo planes and snowmobiles to get hay to snowbound animals to prevent a repeat of the 1997 blizzard that killed up to 30,000 snowbound animals. That disaster resulted in losses of nearly \$28 million worth of livestock who perished when they were cut off and stranded by heavy snowdrifts.

About 60,000 homes and businesses in western Kansas are still in the dark, and utility authorities say it could be more than a week before services are fully restored. Kansas National Guard troops have been called in to go out and deliver generators, supplies, and fuel to shelters and assisted living centers.

In the western Kansas town of Sharon Springs, there was no way to get in or out of town on Monday. But Bill Hassett, manager of the power plant in the town of 835 people, said that none of the residents lost power. "We're snowed under," Hassett said. "We're just in the process of digging out. We had a total of 36 inches of snow. Thank God we kept the lights on."

By Buzzle Staff and Agencies
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